

RUSSIA AND THE WEST IN IRAN

what prompted Great Britain to commit these violations. Such an analysis is not intended either to blacken or to purify British reputation. Its aim is to ascertain whether, in principle and in practice, Great Britain considered Iran as a territory for political expansion and eventual colonization or whether British military operations there were due to causes independent of British will and planning. We have noted earlier²⁵ that Russia's traditional policy with regard to Iran was one of southward expansion at the expense of Iranian independence. It was largely due to Britain's resistance that this southward movement on the part of Russia was never completed. Yet, paradoxically enough, it was also due to Great Britain that, in the last tsarist decade, Russia approached considerably closer to her goal. In 1907 Russia and Great Britain entered into an agreement dividing Iran into British and Russian zones of influence. With British approval Russia secured exclusive political and economic penetration in the whole of northern and central Iran, including the city of Isfahan far toward the south. Teheran, the capital, was deep within the Russian zone. Great Britain satisfied herself with a relatively insignificant and economically poor area in the southeast, adjacent to Indian Baluchistan, while the southwestern region, rich in oil, remained a neutral zone in which neither power had an exclusive claim. This agreement conceded so much to Russia that it could not have been concluded without some special justification. This justification was to be found in the concern of the British government over the rise to power and intense militarization of Imperial Germany, which by that time presented an open

challenge to British
interests in the Middle East. Looking for allies, Great
Britain entered
into the Entente Cordiale with France, settling
outstanding colonial
claims with her in Africa. Next she turned to Russia.
Intense Anglo-
Russian rivalry in Central Asia, existing over many
decades, had to
be adjusted to the new demands of co-operation in
the European
theater, and so the 1907 agreement concerning
Iran, Afghanistan,
and Tibet came about.

The agreement may be regarded as a victory for
British diplomacy
in Europe, but it was clearly an expensive
concession in Asia. That
it was regarded as such both by Russian and
British statesmen is

25 See pp. 2 ff